

WASHINGTON, DC (May 28, 2012) – Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) delivered the following remarks today at a ceremony to commemorate Memorial Day. Schakowsky participated in the Arlington Heights Memorial Day Ceremony.

“Throughout our history, countless Americans have answered the call of duty and fought around the world to protect our nation and our ideals. Today, on Memorial Day, we come together as Americans to honor and remember soldiers who gave their lives in defense of this country.

With the end of U.S. military involvement in Iraq and the beginnings of troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, war has faded from our headlines. But thousands of military families -- families who have lost mothers and fathers; sisters and brothers; sons and daughters – are still coping with the true cost of war.

Over six thousand Americans have died in service of their country in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; over two hundred and forty of these men and women were from Illinois. Throughout history, some one million Americans have given their lives in defense of this country. We’re here today because their sacrifice is not forgotten, because we are truly grateful for their service, and because we share the grief of their families and friends.

In addition to those killed by enemy fire, we continue to lose far too many service members and veterans to suicide. An estimated 18 veterans kill themselves every day. For every soldier killed on the battlefield this year, about 25 veterans are dying by their own hands. These men and women are also casualties of war, and today, on Memorial Day, we remember them and honor their service. Last summer, the Obama Administration took an important step toward recognizing these tragic deaths by reversing the policy of denying Presidential condolence letters to the families of military suicide victims. The families and loved ones of service members lost to suicide deserve to know that our country is grateful for their service and sacrifice.

And to the service members and veterans themselves – today, as we pause to remember the men and women who have died, we also redouble our commitment to serving those who serve us. Service members, military families, and veterans make incredible sacrifices for our country, and we need to ensure that they receive the benefits that they have earned.

As we place an ever-increasing burden on our military, we also need to increase our commitment to ensuring that they and their families have access to the care and services that they need.

We can also make sure that their stories are never forgotten. I'm excited to announce that my office will be participating in the Library of Congress's Veterans History Project, conducting interviews with veterans and collecting documents to ensure that their memories are preserved.

I am very excited to participate in this important project, which will ensure that future generations of Americans will have the opportunity to hear directly from veterans, learning their unique histories and gaining a better understanding of the realities of war. Please let me or my staff know if you or someone you know is interested in participating in this project – the initial emphasis is on those who served in World War II but we want to hear from all veterans who want to tell their story.

Today, on Memorial Day, we recognize the courageous men and women who serve, and we honor the sacrifice of those who have died in defense of this nation. We grieve with the families who have lost loved ones to war. And we remain committed to meeting the needs of all those who answer the call to serve the United States in our armed forces.”

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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